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Mayors from eight North Shore communities joined U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) on Monday in announcing plans to fight the proposed discharge of significantly more ammonia and industrial waste into Lake Michigan by the massive BP oil refinery in Whiting, Ind., after years of effort to clean up the Great Lakes.

"Any time you start putting more pollution into the lake, it's a concern," said North Chicago Mayor Leon Rockingham, who joined officials from Highland Park, Highwood, Kenilworth, Lake Bluff, Lake Forest, Waukegan and Wilmette in announcing formation of the Shoreline Mayors Task Force to address lake issues such as pollution.

BP recently won approval from Indiana regulators to exempt the company from state environmental laws as it prepares for a \$3.8 billion expansion that will allow it to refine heavier Canadian crude oil. Under BP's new water permit, the company, which already is one of the largest polluters of the Great Lakes, can release 54 percent more ammonia and 35 percent more suspended solids, or tiny particles of pollutants that come from sludge.

Although the amounts are still below federal water-quality standards, BP's new permit represents the first time in years that a company has been allowed to increase the amount of pollution it dumps into the lake.

In addition, the new water permit gives the refinery until 2012 to meet stringent federal limits on mercury discharges even though the federal government had ordered states to severely limit mercury discharges into the Great Lakes more than a decade ago.

Ammonia promotes algae blooms that can kill fish, while suspended solids contain heavy metals such as lead and nickel. Mercury threatens the health of humans and fish.

Last week, Gov. Rod Blagojevich joined federal lawmakers in blasting BP on Capitol Hill,

leading to overwhelming passage of a House resolution to condemn the plan.

In its defense, BP, the nation's fourth-largest refinery, said it was investing \$150 million in upgrades to its current wastewater treatment plans while using the best available technology in the facility to protect the lake from dangerous pollutants.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials Peter Swenson and John Mooney also offered assurances at Monday's news conference that the pollution discharges at the plant would not jeopardize the safety of the lake for humans or fish.

The assurances, however, did not satisfy Kirk or the suburban mayors whose communities border the lakefront.

"This is mind-baffling," said Waukegan Mayor Richard Hyde, whose city is working on a \$1.2 billion plan to improve its once industrial shoreline into a residential hub. "It all comes down to, the big guys are going to do what they want to do anyway."

The suburban mayors vowed to exert as much pressure as possible on environmental regulatory officials, Indiana officials and BP to scrap the plan.

"We all have to stick together," said Highwood Mayor Vincent Donofrio.

Kirk said he would propose legislation to remove federal tax benefits from BP or any company that seeks to increase harmful discharges into the lake.

Such measures could make such plans too unprofitable to go forward, Kirk said.

But the 10th District lawmaker from Highland Park also questioned how the permits had been

issued by EPA officials in the first place.

"If pollution is allowed to increase in the Great Lakes, there's something wrong with the system," Kirk said.